

DAILY COMMERCIAL NEWS

AND CONSTRUCTION RECORD

December 24, 2009

Year in Review

Resiliency the story of 2009: Council of Ontario Construction Associations

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In a year where stimulus projects were a major economic focus, the Council of Ontario Construction Associations found construction's resiliency in a tough economy the newsmaker of the year.

"With stimulus money now making its way into the economy and the industry doing as well as it is, in what is being described as the greatest economic decline since the Great Depression, that is the newsmaker," says Ian Cunningham, president, COCA. "Those who are busy are really busy; there is a lot of work going on. There has not been much in industrial and commercial but a lot of institutional work is going on across the province."



Ian Cunningham

The ability and capacity of Ontario's construction industry to respond to economic stimulus efforts, both provincially and federally, came to the forefront over the past year as plans to inject financial assistance into a sinking economy were deemed vital.

Various provincial construction stakeholders assured government that the capacity to respond was not an issue.

Looking ahead to 2010, Cunningham says that despite the possibility "of a second dip" for the slowly recovering economy, COCA remains optimistic that we have turned the corner.

"Industrial business will pick up and fill in, as we get weaned off the stimulus money, once it works its way through," expects Cunningham.

Ontario construction faced major changes via Queen's Park in 2009. Floating in the provincial winds of change was new legislation to form the College of Trades, increase labour mobility and introduce a harmonized sales tax. The College is a professional regulatory college for the province's apprenticeship and skilled trades system, expected to be fully operational in 2012.

"The College of Trades is a big change in the way training is going to be delivered in the skills area of Ontario," says Cunningham. "We had a couple of good wins with amendments made to the Act."

During the consultative phase for the College's legislation, COCA advocated for enlarging the size of construction trades boards and including apprentices in the membership of the College. These were issues raised by other associations and unions as well and were ultimately included in the College's final legislative framework.

"We are also hopeful construction management will have strong representation on the appointments council," adds Cunningham.

Cunningham is also proud of COCA's continued work in pushing for Construction Lien Act reform.

"We've been advancing Construction Lien Act reform and we feel we made some progress in raising the issue," says Cunningham.

"The Ontario Labour Mobility Act allows workers certified in any Canadian province or territory to be employed in Ontario without additional training or testing. This applies to over 80 regulatory authorities and 300 occupations. Concerns about maintaining the integrity of Red Seal certification across the nation were paramount for a majority of construction stakeholders.

"There are industry concerns about training and safety training, but as long as the standards are uniform, labour moving to where there is work is the most efficient thing in the Canadian economy and it should be good for us," adds Cunningham.



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